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KWAZULU-NATAL**

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**Experiences of students living with disabilities at the University of
KwaZulu-Natal Howard College Campus: A qualitative
exploration.**

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Declaration of originality

I, Zizile Ngcobo (Student number: 215075644), declare that:

‘Experiences of students living with disabilities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal-Howard College Campus: A qualitative exploration’ is my original work and that all the sources that were consulted and quoted have been acknowledged in the reference list.

Zizile Ngcobo

26/11/ 2019

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Abstract

Inclusive education policies that were adopted by the South African government led to a relative increase in the number of students living with disabilities (SLWDs) being accepted into higher education institutions (The Department of education, White Paper 6, 2001). This has resulted in marked research interest on the practicality and effectiveness of inclusive education policies and especially on how these students cope in higher education institutions in various disciplines. This study aimed to understand disability and the experiences of SLWD in the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College campus) using the social model of disability. The main focus was therefore on the experiences by SLWDs with regard to the social life, access to facilities, services offered, infrastructure, access to information and methods of teaching and assessment.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants into the study. Participants included 8 students living with various disabilities. Data was collected through in-depth semi structured interviews which focused on experiences of living with a disability in higher education institutions, specifically at University of KwaZulu Natal (Howard college campus). Furthermore, some policy documents were reviewed to understand how the University purports to address the needs of Students living with disabilities. Additionally, literature on experiences of students living with disabilities in higher education was also reviewed.

Data was analyzed thematically and key findings that emerged from the data highlighted the complexities around policy implementation. Findings revealed that although certain policies have been adopted to facilitate inclusive education, students living with disabilities continue to face barriers to learning due to a number of limitations namely: infrastructure, access to information, assistive technologies, teaching and assessment methods.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background of the study

There has been growing interest in issues of disability equality, and a shift toward a more inclusive education system worldwide. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO (2015) is implementing operations across the world to break down barriers that discriminate against students living with disability, hereafter referred to as (SLWD). Countries are required to report their initiatives in support of the right to education for SLWD, and most of the literature reflects the extent to which legislative advancements have improved the experiences of SLWD in higher education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO, 2015).

According to the Council of Higher Education (2005) (CHE), very few investigations of higher education provision for SLWDs have been carried out in South Africa. The Council on Higher Education (2005) acknowledges that disability involves a pivotal and often overlooked part of the definition of equity of access to higher education. The lack of data on experiences of SLWD has prevented the government, relevant organizations and stakeholders from designing and implementing strategies for SLWD as well as evaluating and measuring its impact (Department of Education, 1997). Findings of a study by Kerr and Chaane (2008) revealed that SLWD were placed in a disadvantaged position with regard to access to basic services within institutions, as well as impediments to employment opportunities. Kerr and Chaane (2008) further emphasized the role of awareness and accessibility in all institutions. They recognized how issues regarding experiences of SLWD in higher education should become increasingly prominent, especially with the transformation of the educational landscape in South Africa.

Studies reveal that little is known about the prevalence of SLWD registered in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in South Africa. Healy, Pretorius and Bell (2011) suggested that the population of SLWDs is less than 1 percent of the total population of students registered in many HEIs in South Africa, and the South African education system provides support for the inclusion of SLWDs which is grounded in the human rights framework. However, different factors still impede the adequate

implementation of inclusive education policies, particularly in HEI (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). These barriers include the structure, function, attitudes and dominant beliefs that inform HEI's practices (Howell, 2006).

The aim of this study is to understand the experiences of SLWDs enrolled in the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College). The Social Model of Disability will be used as the theoretical framework to understand the lived experiences of SLWD. The main focus is therefore on the experiences of SLWD with regard to social life, infrastructure, services offered, access to information, assistive technologies and methods of teaching and assessment.

The focus of the study will navigate from the national equity agenda by discussing policies that aim to address inequalities found in many spheres of higher education. According to Mutanga (2015) disability issues have been trivialized when attempts are made to address the inequalities, particularly in higher education. Literature will be reviewed to establish an understanding of what aspects to consider when exploring the experiences of students living with disabilities. The research problem and the significance of the study will be highlighted. The study will also elaborate on the research design and methodology. Findings based on the research questions will be discussed and recommendations will be made.

1.1 Aim/Rationale for study

Available literature suggests that inequalities in higher education are not due to inherent capacities of SLWD but rather to beliefs, attitudes and restrictions imposed by the society on them (Fuller, Healey, Bradely & Hall, 2004). The aim of this study is therefore to explore the experiences of SLWD with the objective of gaining insight into what challenges they face, and how they experience the teaching and learning processes, as well as campus life in general. The findings may be utilized in raising institutional awareness towards facilitating a conducive environment for SLWD. Findings from this study may also be utilized by campus disability units to develop or improve interventions aimed at enhancing the experience of higher education by SLWDs. Another underlying principle behind this study is the lack of research of this nature in South Africa. Little is known about the experiences of SLWD in higher education in our country. This study will use the Social Model of Disability (SMD) as its theoretical framework, as it seems appropriate to the way disability is understood and addressed in various countries, including South Africa. According to Jackson (2018) this model suggests that disability arises from barriers within a discriminating society rather than impairment. Unlike the Medical Model that focuses on the impairment, and views disability as a pitiable condition that needs to be prevented and if possible cured, the SMD shifts the response away from the individual living with disability to society, in order to dismantle barriers in society that construct disability. This drives the current study to utilize the SMD to understand how the social, physical, and learning environment of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College) impacts the SWLD experience of higher education.

1.2 Research Questions

The study seeks to find answers to the following questions:

- What are the social experiences of SLWD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College)?
- What are the academic challenges faced by SLWD University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College)?
- How do SLWD cope with challenges to learning in the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College)?
- What are the daily life experiences of SLWD on campus at University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College?)

1.3 Research objectives

- To describe the social experiences of SLWD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College);
- To explore and document the academic difficulties of SLWD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College);
- To develop an understanding of coping strategies employed by SLWD on campus at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College);
- To describe the daily life of SLWD on campus at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College).

1.4 Summary and Overview of the Study

The current study is composed of five chapters, each chapter addressing different aspects of the study. Chapter 1 is the introduction of the study and elaborates on the aim and significance of the study. Furthermore, research questions and objectives are listed in the introductory chapter.

Chapter 2 is divided into two parts. Part 1 comprises the review of literature from previous studies that have been conducted, relating first to the definition of disability and the experiences of SLWDs as well as the policy developments that have been put in place to improve the lives of SLWD in higher education. The second part of this chapter focuses on the theoretical framework adopted in this study which is the Social Model of Disability.

Chapter three presents the research design and methodology of the current study.

Chapter 4 presents the results and summary of findings.

Chapter Five is concerned with the discussion and conclusion of the study. The concluding sections of the study include limitations of the study as well recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises a review of the literature on the definition of what constitutes disability, and also a review of literature on national and regional policy frameworks that have been developed to improve the higher education system for SLWD. Furthermore, literature on inclusion and exclusion will be discussed and the experiences of SLWD in higher education will be documented.

2.2 Definition of disability

According to Healey, Pretorius and Bell (2011), there are diverse definitions of disability within the South African higher institutions of learning. Each institution has its own policies, ways of categorising disabilities and developing supportive structures for SLWDs. Furthermore, different institutions may adopt different models which may significantly impact on the kinds of services provided and the manner in which they are provided. Studies suggest that the majority of the institutions still predominantly focus on the medical model which defines disability as personal tragedy and reinforces the notion that persons with disability are not comparable with their able-bodied counterparts (Healey, Pretorius & Bell, 2011; Retief & Letsosa, 2018). Consequently, services offered to students are more individualised and there is little improvement on the environmental challenges faced by SLWD such as inaccessibility to buildings or services.

There is a growing acknowledgement of the need to develop a common definition of disability, which is not predominantly focused on physical impairment. According to the Department of Social Development, White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (WPRPD) in South Africa (2015), no single definition of disability has attained international consensus. The final draft on the implementation of the convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in South Africa by Women, Children and People with Disability (2013) suggests that the South African government acknowledges the need to review the ways in which disability is defined. The Department of Social

Development, WPRPD (2015) maintains that the definition of disability should be based on the social model which recognises that disability is imposed by society when people with disabilities are denied full access to participation in some aspects of life based on their physical, psychosocial, intellectual, neurological and or sensory impairment.

Despite the complex nature of defining disability and the proposed shift from the individualistic perspective of the medical model to the structural and social perspective of the social model, the World report on Disability (WHO, 2011) provides a balanced approach which integrates both models. The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) describes functioning and disability as a dynamic interaction between health conditions and contextual factors, both personal and environmental and hence adopted a biopsychosocial model framework which accommodates the standpoints of both the medical and social model (WHO, 2011). For instance it is necessary to understand physical impairment in order to understand the challenges facing those with disability. These physical impairments may often be exacerbated by social conditions and processes. An example that illustrates how biological factors are intrinsically linked with social factors was highlighted in a study by Magnus (2012), in which he gave an example that having to negotiate physical objects in the environment like badly made or unaccommodating chairs can enhance the negative impact on impairment (increased injury or pain). Therefore the definition of disability takes into account the dynamic relationship between the physical impairments and the social environment. This approach to understanding disability enables a broader understanding of each individual and his or her experience in higher education and the manner in which they navigate their social context.

2.3 Inclusive education: From legislation to policy development.

Since the current study is centred on the experiences of SLWD in higher education, it is fitting to explore policies that have been developed toward an inclusive education system. The Department of Education, White Paper 6 (2001) on rights of persons with disabilities describes exclusion as the act of discrimination whereby a group or an individual is socially isolated and marginalised by depriving them the opportunity to fully and equally participate within the society. It is characterised by unequal access to resources and keeping others outside the prevailing society. On the other hand, inclusion embraces the diversity of all people irrespective of their disability and other differences. It is viewed as a universal human right that encourages a sense of belonging, and a supportive environment that enables everyone to fully participate in the society without barriers (Department Of Education, 2001).

Following the 1994 democratic elections, the South African government made attempts to rectify the impact of apartheid and reverse social injustices suffered by black people, particularly women and those living with disabilities (Marumoagae, 2012). Inclusive education was also part of that process and the development of an inclusive education system can be traced back to the nation's founding document stating:

“Everyone has the right –

(a) to a basic education and

(b) to further education which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.

The state may not discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including disability” (South African Government, Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996, p. 12).

Additionally, the framework for an inclusive education system was laid out in the Department Education, White Paper 6 (2001). The broad scope of this policy attempts to address the diverse needs of all learners who experience barriers to learning. The policy is based on the following premises:

- All children, youth and youth adults have potential to learn, given the necessary support;
- The system's inability to recognise and accommodate the diverse range of learning needs results in breakdown of learning (Department of education White Paper, 2001, 24).

Studies indicate that South African higher education institutions have adopted the above-described enabling policies to address barriers to learning in the education system. However, the implementation of inclusive education remains relatively slow and only partial (Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007). This suggests the need to for studies on the challenges in implementing inclusive education policies as well as research on how SLWD experience policy reforms.

Research has found that whilst lecturers agree with the need for inclusion, they acknowledge that they face problems in attending to needs of SLWD (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Donohue and Bornman (2014) further reported that lecturers believe that the needs of learners, particularly those with greater special needs and severe disabilities, are best met in separate classrooms. Other studies (Muntanga, 2015) suggest that a contributing factor to these problems is that lecturers lack awareness of disability-related matters. Muntanga (2015) further attributes this lack of awareness to variety of issues, such as absence of mandatory training on diversity management by universities, and large classes which place a burden on lecturers to attend to individual needs of each student. South African literature indicates lack of research on the views and experiences of higher education academic and administrative staff, and Muntanga emphasises the importance of finding out what does and does not work for the staff members in their quest to create an inclusive environment for SLWD (Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007).

Other studies suggest that a general lack of support and resources and the prevailing attitudes toward disability all contribute to the perceived crisis in the drive for inclusive education (Borman & Rose, 2010). Findings in a study conducted by Naidoo (2010) suggest that the lack of resources coupled with the lack of trained staff make it even more difficult for SLWD to cope academically. The lack of resources means that the available staff do not have the necessary equipment to assist the large number

of SLWD and meet their academic needs. Wildeman and Nomdo (2007) suggest that the Department of Education seems to have deficits in funding for HEI, while the institutions lack capacity to accommodate diverse learners.

According to Donohue and Bornman (2014), the implementation of an inclusive education policy in South Africa is currently at a standstill. They suggest that the primary means by which the divide between inclusive policy and practice can be closed is through the implementation and enforcement of education policy by the South African Department of Education.

2.4 Challenges facing students with disabilities

Literature suggests that students living with disabilities are faced with numerous challenges in HEI, which include access to infrastructure, flexibility of programmes, assessment procedures, functionality of systems as well as the culture and attitudes that negatively impact on them (Howell, 2006; Healey, Pretorius, & Bell, 2011). It would appear that SLWD are still excluded from certain fields of study due to management's perceptions of incapacity. Justifications such as the need for fieldwork and rigorous off-campus practicals and use of specific tools are often cited to prevent SLWD from enrolling in certain degree programmes. Challenges related to assessment, access to information, assistive technologies and infrastructure will be discussed below.

2.4.1 Assessment

A study by Muntanga (2015) reflected varied responses to experiences of assessment. The overall concern by most participants pointed to the fact that not all methods of assessment are fair and desirable for all students. Blind participants raised concerns with the delay of availability of study material in braille, which resulted in limited participation in group tasks and in the classroom. In another study by Naidoo (2010), participants reported the limited number of printers and scanners available for learners with special needs to scan and edit study material. As a result, students did not

get their study material in time to prepare for tests and examinations. Consequently, students were penalised with poor performance and late submissions.

There are also inconsistencies in the manner in which examinations are regulated. Participants in a study by Brandt (2011) said that invigilators and examination administrators did not consistently follow recommendations made by lecturers for SLWD. They said staff were not obliged to follow recommendations as they were only suggestions and not mandatory. The participants in Brandt's study further reported conflicts between the decisions made by the advisory service and those of the administrators in charge of the examination.

While some studies highlight the challenges faced by SLWDs, others have shed light on positive experiences. A study by Naidoo (2010) argued that although traditional methods of evaluation and assessment still appear to dominate, some students reported positive experiences. Brandt further stated that SLWD appreciated the special arrangements for writing final examinations, such as the provision of separate examination rooms, allocation for extra time, and having interpreters working at a computer to translate sign language into written language.

A recent study exploring experiences of SLWD in HEI by Kendall and Tarman (2016) found that some participants viewed the support services offered to SLWD in HEI as a positive resource. Participants particularly valued the invitation to attend a meeting with the student support service in order to identify what provision could be put in place in order to assist them. Research also shows that although this is not consistent throughout universities, some individual lecturers have accommodated students such as arranging a suitable environment for a student with a severe medical disability to rest periodically during an exam when fatigued. Other lecturers have provided SLWD with pre-recorded prescribed reading material, and even permitted students to record lectures (Duquette, 2000).

2.4.2 Access to information

Research shows that another challenge faced by SLWD has to do with access to information. In a study by Fuller, Healey, Bradely and Hall (2004) on experiences of SLWD in higher education, participants noted that they had difficulty in finding out about available devices and assistance for learning and assessment. They reported that there was no mechanism within the institution for that information to be routinely relayed to lecturers. As a result, it was always up to the students to make arrangements for learning. This gave rise to frustrating incidents of SLWD having to suffer the embarrassment of having to repetitively signal their special needs.

Another study by Muntanga (2015) highlighted that SLWD who enrolled in higher education for the first time had limited knowledge about higher education programmes as well as available assistive technologies, which resulted in them making uninformed decisions when choosing a career. Participants in Muntanga's study reported that they were in enrolled in courses that they would not have chosen if they had been well-informed with capacity to choose any programme of study.

According to a study by Fuller, Bradley and Healey (2004) students, particularly those who suffered from dyslexia and those who were partially sighted, found information centres inadequate for their needs. This made browsing for and finding books difficult, while the staff were not always helpful. Chiwandire and Vincent (2017) acknowledged that although funds may not be available to change an entire campus to accommodate SLWD, universities were still failing to prioritise vital facilities such as the library. Chiwandire and Vincent (2017), further argued that in most campuses, libraries were housed in old buildings which were regarded as heritage sites, making it difficult to implement any structural changes that would accommodate SLWDs, making access to information for wheelchair users limited.

2.4.3 Assistive technologies

According to Mantsha (2016) assistive technology can be described as any item or piece of equipment that is used to increase, maintain or improve the learning capabilities of SLWD. Access to information for learning by using assistive technology may enable SLWD to maximise their potential and ability to achieve individualised objectives. Ahmad (2015) mentions a few assistive technologies that are used in most universities today.

- Track balls, head trackers and touch screens are used as alternatives to the computer mouse.
- Adjustable computer desks for students with mobility impairments.
- Keyboard guards for individuals with limited fine motor control.
- Optical braille recognition software and text to speech software such as JAWS (Job Access with Speech) for students who are visually impaired.
- Anti-glare screens for students with low vision
- Computerised speech recognition software that translates spoken message into readable text document for students with hearing impairment.

Literature shows that while assistive technologies may enhance access to learning for SLWDs, it may at times have limitations. For example, a study by Mokiwa and Phasha (2012) reported that certain software used for visually impaired students could not read mathematical and scientific signs or graphic material. Furthermore, Kajee's (2010) study on a technology-based English course found that visually impaired students often felt isolated and powerless as a result of pedagogical challenges presented by the software. These studies highlight the need to interrogate assistive technologies that are designed to assist SLWD, as they may have the potential to disadvantage the very people they are meant to help.

Research shows that some assistive technologies may require great effort in order for SLWD to access and properly use them. The barriers include lack of training, lack of appropriate teacher

preparation and support, poor management and servicing of the equipment, limited funding to acquire the assistive technologies – and the fact that previously disadvantaged groups may have never been exposed to technology in high school (Ahmed, 2018). However, the barriers are not necessarily limited to the above.

2.4.4 Infrastructure

Accessibility entails making it possible for persons living with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life. According to Howel and Lazurus (2003), minimal progress has been made in South African universities with regard to configuring campus environments in order to ensure equal access for SLWD. Physical access remains one of the greatest challenges faced by SLWD in higher education, and proponents of inclusive education emphasise the need to prioritise access to facilities such as libraries, lecture halls, restrooms as well as modes of transport (Thomas 2012).

Chiwandire and Vincent (2017) reported on numerous instances where SLWD were denied admission to public universities on the ground that the university did not have appropriate facilities to accommodate them. One such instance was in 2015 when the Tshwane University of Technology turned down a wheelchair user's application because the university was not accessible to wheelchair users. Evidence suggests that SLWD still experience discrimination and marginalisation by being deprived the opportunity to fully and equally participate in higher education.

Findings in another study by Connor and Robinson (2009) pointed out the challenges experienced by SLWD due to unaccommodating infrastructure in the University of Ulster. Numerous participants reported that both the steps at the main entrance and inside buildings were difficult to use and were not suitable for their needs. Similarly, participants in a study by Chiwandire and Vincent (2017) reported that although lifts were available on campus, most of the time they were out of use and some lecture halls were not reachable using a lift.

It would appear that inherent barriers still exist within universities' teaching curricula, particularly with the materials used in teaching, organisation or management of classes, access to study materials; and there are barriers relating to assessment procedures (Healey et al., 2011). Hence, there is a need to conduct studies aimed at developing flexible and inclusive curricula as well as adopting appropriate teaching and learning strategies for the benefit of SLWD.

2.5 Disability units in South African Higher Education Institutions

To ensure equal learning opportunities for all students in HEI, developing diverse and effective support mechanisms within a HEI is essential (Shevlin, Kenny & McNeela, 2004). Whilst various institutions have developed different initiatives and structures to support their SLWD, a common initiative is the creation of a disability unit (DU) which is usually as the first point of call for all SLWD within the institution (Healey et al., 2011; Naidoo, 2010). These units operate to assist SLWD by facilitating equal and active participation in learning activities within the institution. According to Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, and Acosta (2005), the responsibility of the disability unit involves:

- Organising orientation programmes for SLWD;
- Training students with different impairments to use different learning equipment;
- Liaising with lecturers to make reasonable adjustments to academic schedules to accommodate SLWD;
- Facilitating physical accessibility to infrastructures (lecture venues/computer LAN); and
- Making alternative arrangements, as well as providing study materials such as braille and electronic textbooks for SLWDs.

Disability units are further responsible for creating awareness and educating the entire university community about disability, developing institutional policies on disability, providing personal and

academic support as well as specialist services (such as sourcing sign language interpreters, counsellors, facilitators and mentors), providing conducive accommodation, providing financial assistance and devoting extra time to ensure fair assessments (Healey, Pretorius & Bell, 2011). However, research shows that DUs are faced with challenges ranging from resource constraints that limit the range of services offered, reluctance of academic staff to make necessary amendments to schedules, lack of collaboration with the various departments within the institutions, shortage of competent staff, funding the unit itself and insufficient equipment to meet the needs of SLWD (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer & Acosta, 2005; Healey, et al., 2011). A collaborative effort is needed to meet these challenges as the quality of support may impact on the students' academic performance, thereby impacting on the overall throughput rates of the institution.

The academic progress of students is dependent on the disposition of academic staff towards providing the required support (Fuller et al., 2004). Moreover, disability impacts on SLWDs' learning experiences and they tend to encounter intense challenges when the required support services are lacking. Lecturers' unwillingness to make flexible adjustments to their class schedules, venues, lecture notes, teaching and assessment techniques to accommodate SLWDs may result in poor academic outcomes (Fuller et al., 2004). Naidoo (2010) reported that SLWD tend to perform poorly when not provided with the relevant study material in advance to prepare for assessments (tests and examinations). Thus, academic staff attitudes can potentially hinder SLWD from achieving their best if they fail to provide supportive structures (Fuller et al., 2004). Therefore, lecturers and other academic staff should ideally be trained and provided with the skills necessary to assist SLWD.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

Scholars have used different models to explain and understand disability, because they have found defining disability as complex and knotty (Schuelka, 2014). According to Anastasiou and Kauffman (2013), disability is understood differently in different social contexts depending on the individual performance and the expectations and demands of the social group that each individual belongs. This conception of disability is seen in the way studies in other social context, such as churches, and community centres have used different models to explain disability. For instance, a study by Mackelprang (2010), used the Moral model of disability which associates disability with sin, shame and guilt. According to this model, disability is a manifestation of sin and a test and challenge for non-disabled people to achieve salvation through serving disabled people. Another study by Reiser (2009) used the moral model as its theoretical framework. This model is similar to the moral model, it views disability as a condition imposed by people's beliefs in fate and deities. There are a number of other models that have been used by disability scholars over the years, among others is the rehabilitation model, disability model, medical model and the social model.

Recent studies indicate how over the years, most governments and countries are increasingly viewing and understanding disability in a more consistent manner with international policy declarations and instruments. One of the primary goals of disability rights is to move society to a new and more positive understanding of what it means to have a disability (Kaplan, 2000).

According to Oliver (2004), the understanding of disability was turned completely on its head when the social model of disability (SMD) was introduced in 1976. Previously, the medical model was accepted as framework to understand disability, and it dominated disability policy and service provision for many years. Studies showed that the SMD emanated from critiques of the medical model who, according to Reindal (2009), adopted an 'abnormal-normal' perspective and located the problem of disability in the extent to which an individual differed from the norm. Critiques argued that the

medical model was not representative of the experiences of disabled people as it failed to consider the social, economic, historical and political factors that played a part in the lives of those living with disabilities (Jackson, 2018).

This study sets out to use the SMD in framing our understanding of the experiences of SLWD in the UKZN (Howard College campus)). The SMD tends to prevail in the way disability is understood and addressed in various countries, including South Africa. According Tugli, Klu and Morwe, (2017), the social model of disability seeks to ensure that people living with disabilities participate equally with others in all spheres of life. The SMD suggests that the collective disadvantages of persons with disabilities is directly linked to a complex form of institutional discrimination created by the unaccommodating environment (Burger & Burger, 2010). In other words, the SMD looks at focuses on the world around, and the disability is the is supposed to be caused due to beliefs, attitude and restrictions imposed by the society. Thus, for SLWD the SMD serves as an informational base for the promotion of an inclusive and equitable quality education. It also highlights perceived and identified barriers that impact on the experiences of SLWD in higher education.

This implies that society should be reconstructed and developed to address the developmental needs of persons with disabilities within a framework of inclusive development. This paradigm shift introduced by the SMD lists four illustrations of how HEI contribute to the way SLWD experience disability in higher education.

“It is the stairs leading into a building that disable the wheelchair user rather than the wheelchair.”

“It is defects in the design of everyday equipment that causes difficulties, not the abilities of the person using it.”

“It is society’s lack of skill in using and accepting alternative ways to communicate that excludes people with communication disabilities.”

“It is the inability of schools to deal with diversity in the classroom that forces children with disabilities into special schools.” (Council on Higher Education, 2005, p. 5).

Studies suggest that societal shortcomings may significantly affect the ways in which SLWD experience their environment. This, according to Burger and Burger, (2010), suggests that the infrastructure, teaching methods, administrative procedures, attitudes and values adopted in higher education may be linked to the way those with disabilities experience being part of that environment.

Shakespeare and Watson, (2002) suggest that the SMD has an impact on people with disabilities. It grants them a sense of liberation from the medical model, in that it shifts the problem as arising from them to deficits in society. They are able to understand that it is not their fault when they are suffering from their limitations. It gives them a new way of thinking about themselves, and empowers them to mobilise, organise, and work for equal citizenship. According to this model, the disabling factor is not the person with an impairment – the person has impairment but is disabled by the society through its inaccessible structures, systems and environment.

The SMD has, however, come under criticism in recent studies on account of its over-emphasis on the social environment. Watermeyer (2013), notes the relative inattention of the social model to the personal and psychological experience of disability. He suggests that, with the emphasis in SMD on the barriers in the external environment, the individual’s psychological experience of the disability is underexplored. The model implicitly disavows consideration of personal experiences. SMD was also criticised for its focus on the physical and built environment for people with physical impairments and less consideration for people living with other types of impairments or health conditions (Shakespeare, 2006). For example, lack of physical access is easier to notice as an objective reality than social exclusion for someone living with albinism (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002).

The current study seeks to explore the experiences of SLWD at UKZN Howard College campus. These experiences include learning, social life, assessment, infrastructure, access to information and assistive technologies. The SMD was found useful for the current study as it offered a platform to enquire how SLWD experience the social construction of disability in the campus. The qualitative methods enquiry that are used in the study will also work well with the SMD, by identifying barriers in the University society that inhibit the full participation of SLDW in higher education from each individuals viewpoint. The focus of SMD on the built and physical environment will assist in understanding how SLWD experience the learning environment, in the hope that these findings can be used to create accommodative higher education institutions.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter covered the definition of disability and the shift from understanding disability through the medical model to a more social-based conceptualisation using the social model of disability. It further discussed numerous policies regarding inclusive education and the extent to which they have been implemented in higher education institutions. Literature revealed that that despite the transformation and enactment of various disability policies, students with disabilities continue to face barriers in their educational environment. The challenges discussed include teaching methods, assessments, access to information, assistive technologies, and physical access. While most studies that reported on negative experiences were explored, positive experiences were also discussed. The supportive structures for SLWDs in high education institutions such as disability units for was discussed. Lastly, a brief overview of different models of disability was discussed and the rational for the SMD as the theoretical framework of the study was documented.

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology.

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses in detail the design and research methods of this study as well as the rationale for positioning this study within those methods.

3.2 Design of the study

This study is concerned with the quality and texture of the experiences of disabled students in an academic institution. Creswell (2014) argues that qualitative research approaches are better for investigating subjective meaning, understanding attitudes and beliefs; Whereas quantitative methods have their strengths in identifying universalities and making statistical and probabilistic generalizations, or in correlation between two measurable phenomena. When one considers the dearth of information on disabled students in higher education as well as the subjective experience of being in an academic institution, a qualitative approach was found to be applicable for this study.

Creswell (2009) further explains qualitative research as means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribes to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions, data collection typically in participants setting, data analysis inductively building from biographical information to general themes and finally the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data.

Supporting Creswell's argument, Mohajan, (2018) asserts that qualitative research is a form of social interaction, that places emphasis on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences to understand their reality. It is a holistic approach that involves discovery and enables the researcher to develop a level of detail from active involvement in the actual experience. It is exploratory in nature and seeks to explain how and why a particular social phenomenon operates as it does in a particular context and helps us to understand the social world in which we live (Williams,2007). Given the

objective of this study to explore and describe subjective experiences of SLWD through active engagement, a qualitative approach was considered suitable for this study.

The interpretivist paradigm that will guide this study sees the world as constructed and experienced by people in their interactions with one another. It encourages collaboration with the participants and focuses on the meaning ascribed by people to facts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) further explain that the interpretivist paradigm is concerned with understanding the world of human experience. The researcher relies on the views of the participants in the situation that is being studied, and then generates a pattern of meanings.

3.4 Study participants

The population of the study was students living with disabilities enrolled at UKZN (Howard College Campus). Non-probability sampling (purposive sampling) which, according to Lawrence, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, and Hoagwood (2015) allows for identification and selection of information-rich cases, was used to access the prospective sample. In order to include participants with a range of experiences relating to the research topic, the researcher recruited undergraduates and post-graduates as well as students of different faculties, and, most importantly, with different limitations. Table 3.4.1 below shows the category of disability and the number of participants each category.

Table 1 Category of study participants

Participant Category	Number of participants
Blindness	3
Limited mobility	5
Total number of participants	8

Before the interviews, the disability unit provided the researcher with a list of potential participants for the study, which increased the opportunity of selecting information-rich participants. As described above, the researcher adopted the purposive sampling strategy in selecting eight participants, who were specifically chosen for their potential to provide in-depth information due to their insight and years of experience. The small group of well-informed participants had the potential to yield interesting, insightful and in-depth information based on real-life experiences (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbon, 2015).

3.5 Data collection

The instrument used to collect qualitative data was the interview guide. The researcher employed semi-structured interview approach as it allowed the participants to express their own experiences in their own words (Smith and Osborn, 2007; Creswell, 2014). It also allowed for new ideas to be brought up to prompt discussion. The interview schedule was developed after a review of literature on experiences of SLWD in HEI. In addition, Mike Oliver's framework of understanding experiences of disability in society was reviewed.

Themes extracted from the literature were used in framing the open-ended questions. The interview questions covered themes such as the nature of disability, learning experiences, access to facilities, and social challenges. The open-ended nature of the questions offered the interviewer the

opportunity to probe further by asking follow-up questions. During the interview, the interviewer asked questions about challenges experienced by SLWD with regard to access to the infrastructure of the university, teaching methods, social life and assessment methods. Furthermore, the interviewer asked about the provisions put in place to assist SLWDs.

The interviews were conducted in the participants' residences for their convenience. Provision was also made to conduct interviews at the Howard College psychology clinic consultation rooms to ensure privacy. However, all participants preferred to use their residence rooms, as this was convenient for them. They all found it more comfortable to be in familiar surroundings, especially those living with blindness. The interviews were conducted in both isiZulu and English and each interview lasted from 30-50 minutes. An audio recorder was used to record the interviews. This allowed deep interaction with the participants as the interviewer was able to pay full attention to what was being said. The interviews were all later transcribed into English.

The trustworthiness of the study depended on the credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability of the questions (Ulin, Robinson and Tolley, 2005). In order to ensure the rigour of the current study, credible sources of information and methods were used in carrying out the study. Prior to data collection standard open-ended questions were developed and used in all the interviews to ensure uniformity in the research procedure. The interview schedule, interview transcripts, research questions and the findings and conclusion of the study were reviewed regularly to ensure they aligned with the main focus of the study. Students in different levels of study, faculties and with different types of disability were purposively selected to increase the prospect of transferability. Nonetheless, different contextual factors may affect the transferability of the current study.

3.6 Data analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data was analysed using thematic analysis. Alhojailan (2012) proposes that thematic analysis is most appropriate for any study that seeks to discover using interpretations. It is capable of identifying and detecting factors or variables that influence any issue generated by the participants. It provides the researcher with a systematic element for data analysis.

The four-stage process of analysis proposed by Willig (2001) was employed in the current study. The first step involves the researcher reading and re-reading of texts to familiarise himself or herself with the data. The second step proposed by Willig (2001) requires the researcher to identify and label themes that characterise each section of the texts. This was done by reviewing the scripts and making notes and comments in the margins of each transcript. Data was classified according to themes that emerged during the interviews. Each theme was coded to allow the recording of patterns across data sets. Thirdly, themes that were identified in the second step were listed in order to seek connections between the them. Some of the themes formed natural clusters of concepts with shared meaning, and these were clustered into main themes. Sub-themes were developed to accommodate themes that were peculiar to some transcripts. The clusters of themes were given labels that captured their essence. The fourth stage involved the production of a summary table together with quotations that illustrated each theme.

3.7 Ethical considerations

To ensure that the current study was ethically sound, it was granted full ethical clearance by the Human Social Sciences Research Committee of UKZN. Before the interviews were conducted, the interviewer sought the participants' informed consent through an informed consent letter. The interviewer also provided an in-depth explanation about the nature of the study to each participant and assured them of both confidentiality and anonymity. They were informed of their right to voluntarily participate and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalties (Burns & Grove, 2011).

Students were also informed about Psychology clinic within the University that would be available in the event where one may feel traumatized from the interview process.

According to Haig (2008), non-maleficence relates to protecting the participants from any harm. This includes the appropriate storage of data in a confidential manner. To ensure non-maleficence, permission was sought and obtained from each of the participants to use an audio-recorder. All interviews were confidential and interview transcripts were labelled using pseudonyms. Beneficence involves the promotion of good for others (Haig, 2008), and the hope is that the current study will provide an overall benefit to the wider population of SLWDs.

3.8 Conclusion

This Chapter covered the design of the study, Data collection method, Data analysis and ethical considerations. Since this study is concerned with the subjective experience of SLWD in the University of KwaZulu Natal (Howard College), and the meaning they give to their encounters, the qualitative approach was deemed suitable. The data collection method was discussed and as suggested by Creswell (2014), semi structured interviews were employed in the study to allow participants to express their experiences in their own words. Wiling's four stage process of analysis was discussed, and Ethical considerations and procedures followed in the study were documented.

Chapter 4: Results of the study

4.1 Introduction

The Findings have been categorized into 5 main themes with associated sub-themes. The 5 main themes are Nature of disability, Experience of learning institution, Facility Accessibility, other challenges due to disability and coping mechanisms. A summary of themes and sub-themes arising from the data is presented in Table 2 below. Each theme will be discussed and relevant data relating to each theme will be extracted and documented verbatim.

4.2 Main themes

Table 2: Summary of themes and subthemes

Main themes	Sub-themes
1. Nature of disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Onset of disability<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ From birth▪ Acquired due to different health conditions
2. Experience of the learning institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Learning experiences<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Problem with Learning materials▪ Problem with Teaching methods▪ Problem with Lecturers' understanding of disability▪ Problem with Assessment▪ Problem with Lecture venue● Problem with Orientation of the environment● Problem with Individualistic culture of the university● Problem with Orientation/mentorship

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Problem with Disability unit effort/limitation • Problem with Mobility around campus • Problem with Degree of assistance
3. Facilities' accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructures to aid learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lan/ Jaw software ▪ Laptops ▪ Funding for wheelchairs and specialized technology ▪ Library
4. Other challenges due to disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People's perception of disability
5. Coping mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support groups

The participants' socio-demographics are as follows: a total of eight participants living with a disability participated in the study. The majority (n=6) were males and the remaining (n=2) were females. The participants' age ranged between 22 and 34years. Most of the participants are living with a physical disability (n=5) which confines them to wheelchairs and crutches; the remaining (n=3) participants are living with visual impairment. The findings have been categorised into six major themes with associated sub-themes. A summary of the themes and sub-themes emerging from the data is presented in table 1.

4.2.1 Nature of the disability

Results under this theme revealed that some people were born with their disability while others developed them from degenerating health conditions. Four participants revealed that they were born with the condition while others described the circumstances that led to their disability.

“I was not born blind, I became blind in 2010 after a gunshot. . .I was partially sighted before then my sight deteriorated up until I became totally blind.” (participant 1)

“It started from an illness then it deteriorated.” (participant 5)

“I was born with a bone condition called osteogenesis imperfect.” (participant 3)

“I was born with a disease called osteogenesis imperfect.” (participant 7)

4.2.2 Experiences of the learning institution

The participants mentioned different challenges they encountered within the university. The challenges which cut across all the transcripts included problems associated with lecture venues, inadequate orientation and mentorship, the individualistic culture of the university and the degree of assistance they received.

Participants said the most distressing problem was in accessing lecture theatres, most of whom mentioned that they had missed several lectures because the lecture venues were inaccessible. Some mentioned that they failed and were repeating some modules on this account. A participant mentioned that he was forced to abandon a module because he could not access the lecture venue.

“The main challenge for us is accessing the lecture venues but then when you have gained access to them everything is fine.” (participant 7)

“There are classes that I cannot access. Yooh it is hell, in each and every start of the semester a student with a wheelchair can stay a month without attending. He or she

will be busy trying to sort out venues . . . when I could not gain access to the venue I was then forced to change the course.” (participant 8)

“ . . . the problem started when I was in second year. I ended up dropping out on the second semester which is why I am still doing my second-year modules. I dropped out because I could not access any of the venues for all my four modules. I couldn't take it anymore then I decided to go home”. (participant 6)

“The main issue for me is the department of political science; it is situated in a place that is inaccessible for me.”(participant 5)

Participants found moving around campus a major challenge as most of the infrastructure was not designed to ease mobility for people living with disabilities. Where there were lifts they were often not functional and only few buildings had ramps.

“Since the lifts get broken almost every week, the students then end up deregistering for that module.” (participant 7)

“The lifts going to such venues are usually not working; it can be faulty for like two weeks. I made them aware of this but they said there is nothing that they can do.” (participant 5)

“It is a challenge if you are mobile through a wheelchair because the infrastructure in itself is constraining. For instance, some venues do not have ramps or lifts. Lecture venues such as L5 and L4 are not accessible, so if I have classes there it becomes a challenge for me. Sometimes the lifts are not working, meaning I cannot attend my classes. mmm so I could say that the infrastructure is not suitable.” (participant 3).

Parking in spaces that are not designated for parking and the improper placing of objects that obstructed movement further made moving around campus difficult.

“You know, there are people who just park wherever they like. For example, when you go to the library from residence there is no designated parking, but you find you are stuck, there is car on this side and in front. There are also rubbish bins that obstruct my way. This also draws attention from non-disabled students.”

(participant 1)

The difficulty in moving around campus was compounded by the inadequate orientation given to people living with disabilities; there were no mentors to give them proper orientation about the school environment due to lack of incentives. In cases where mentors were assigned they were inexperienced and detailed information about the school environment was not provided. Most of the participants mentioned that they had to find their way around the campus by themselves.

“This year things were different; non-disabled students got mentors while the disabled did not. I think the main reason for the disabled students to not get mentors is that the university does not offer incentives to mentors from the disability unit.”

(participant 5)

“I think the disability unit needs to really improve in that part. They excluded us; they said that they will facilitate a special mentorship programme for students living with disabilities but did not call the same mentors that mentored non-disabled students. They brought us inexperienced mentors No I did not have a mentor; I had to find my way around.” (participant 7)

However a participant mentioned that he was assigned to a personal trainer employed by the school.

“The training is from an independent trainer that is hired by the school; she works with disabled students. I have appointments with her every week. I’m not as fully orientated around campus, we are taking it one step at a time.” (participant 6)

Adapting to the school environment was quite challenging for some of the participants. Some of the participants mentioned that seeking for assistance could be difficult due to the individualistic nature of the school environment.

“My first year was tough because I had to familiarise myself with the environment so it was not easy at all. Even going to class was difficult . . . when you have a problem you have to ask from assistance from others . . . maybe two out of 10 students attempted to help me. To be realistic, people did not have time for me; they were busy minding their own businesses.” (participant 2)

“I was so shocked when I first came in here. It was a different environment altogether. Everybody was taken care of and the environment was conducive in my previous school. But when I came in here it was a different ball game. The first thing I noticed here was that everybody minds their own business . . . people are not easily approachable. It is very difficult to ask [for] help; it feels like you are a burden to them.” (participant 3)

Furthermore, some of the participants mentioned that some of the lecturers were not knowledgeable about disability and the challenges students living with disabilities faced; hence they paid inadequate attention to the needs of students living with disability.

“ . . . some of my lecturers do not understand the concept of disability . . . if the room is not that full you would still sit at the back. Worst of all some of the lecturers do not want to use microphones so you barely hear”. (participant 5)

*“Another thing is that some lecturers do not understand that a blind student would need lecturer slides earlier because they need to be converted in a specific format.”
(participant 4)*

However some lecturers tried to accommodate students living with disabilities, according to one of the participants:

“ . . . there are lecturers that understand our condition and try to be accommodative by sending us emails with study material”. (participant 1)

Some of the participants also mentioned that the teaching methods did not accommodate students with disability.

“ . . . you see the methods of teaching in class for me as partial blind student . . . arrh . . . sometimes you have to explain your condition to the lecturers then they could change the method so as to accommodate you . . . you see when there is a visually impaired student in class sometimes it's best to ask questions so that they can feel accommodated. It not that I want to showcase my intelligence to others but lecturers have this tendency of teaching all the way without asking questions from the class. So there is minimal engagement between students and the lecturer. Other non-blind students are able to see the slides on the projector and I cannot; if then a lecturer ask questions I can also be alert and co-operate. I feel that this would be a better method”. (participant 2)

“Sometimes you will find the lecturer switching the projector and obviously you cannot see what is projected. Then he or she points at you and ask questions based on what is displayed and it’s become difficult to answer.” (participant 1)

When asked about their experiences of assessments, majority of the participant seem to be satisfied with the assessment process.

“ . . . no when it comes to that I don’t think there is a problem because there are people at the disability unit who are hired to transcribe what we have written especially for students who are using the braille and those who are not fast in terms of using the computer”. (participant 2)

“ . . . we have a disability unit that takes care of our tests. In case you need a scribe they take care of that. Some of us cannot write; even if one is able to write, he or she might not be fast enough to cover the test time. We also have extra time”. (participant 5)

“We write at the disability unit here at the student union buildingWe get 15 minutes extra in every hour. In terms of work there is nothing bothering.” (participant 8)

4.2.3 Access to the required facilities

People living with disabilities require specialised facilities to ease learning; however many of the participants mentioned they encountered different challenges while trying to access the facilities required. A common challenge was the inability to access study materials at the library, mostly due to mobility challenges, although some of the blind participants mentioned lack of audio books.

“ . . . at the library there are no audio books and brailed books. Books should be converted to audio so as to accommodate the blind students”. (participant 2)

“It is difficult for me to access study material at the library, more especially because it’s written in black and white. So as a visually impaired person I cannot access that information, I would have to scan and convert the material to Microsoft Word so that the software programme that I have mentioned earlier can read it.” (participant 10)

“I quitted, I don’t go to the library anymore . . . I rarely go to the library; I only go there if there is session that we have to attend. My problem with the library is that the lifts are used at your own risk.” (participant 5)

“The only problem is the lift; for instance at the main library there’s only one lift working. Since everyone is using it, it usually does not work on weekends and then I cannot go to the upper levels.” (participant 7)

Another challenge was the delay in receiving their study materials from the disability unit due to shortage of staff and insufficient equipment.

“ . . . the staffs at the disability unit are insufficient. Even the equipment that they are using such as scans and photocopiers are not enough. So you cannot really blame them for delays. So we find ourselves in an angle where we always submitting work late and left behind in academics due to the delays of study material . . . a book or journal takes approximately three weeks to be converted and given back to you. So my study life becomes difficult when I need to access the material”. (participant 1)

“ . . . I believe that we can do much better if we receive our study material earlier. We found ourselves in a dilemma of underperformance due to the delays of study material from the disability unit”. (participant 2).

“ . . . Converting books to soft copies is a long process so they no longer do the whole book; you will have to pick those chapters that you need the most or feel that they are relevant. This is a disadvantage to us because other students have access to the whole book, you see . . . Can you imagine writing your exams or tests with insufficient knowledge”. (participant 6)

Moreover, some of the participants living with visual impairment also mentioned the difficulties they encounter with using the JAWS software

“ . . . there is a huge problem, new students are struggling to such an extent that they seek assistance from older (returning) students so that they can learn JAWS”. (participant 2)

“ . . . this thing called Turnitin. (Laugh) . . . The JAWS software program that I have mentioned earlier cannot read things like photos. So you find yourself in a huge problem for not knowing exactly your similarity rate”.

The challenges faced at the residences were also highlighted by majority of the participants. Many complained about the difficulties they encountered particularly with sharing kitchens and bathrooms as well as the size of their rooms.

“I feel that the issue of kitchens and stoves should be improved. As you know at this residence there are non-disabled students and disabled students particularly the blind. Imagine we all using the same kitchen, there is a high possibility I might knock

someone by mistake. In this sense I feel like blind students should cook in their rooms to avoid such accidents.” (participant 1)

“Residence is another place where they did not consider disabled people. There was like five or six people with wheelchairs and there is one wheelchair bathroom. There’s also one kitchen on this floor and the appliances always get broken. Persons with wheelchairs . . . we are given smaller rooms compared to other students without wheelchairs. It does not make sense; we are the one who need the space the most.” (participant 8)

However, some mentioned that measures to make life easier for them were currently being implemented.

“. . . in our residence we had to fight to be allowed to have stoves in our rooms. It was a huge challenge because the rules say no stoves allowed. So when they made rules they never really thought about us. I can never carry a pot from kitchen to my room . . . we won that fight because we have permission now”. (participant 4)

A participant also mentioned that the funding and laptops he received made significant contributions to meeting his educational needs.

“All my educational needs are relatively satisfied because I am funded, I’ve got a laptop.” (participant 3).

4.2.4 Other challenges due to disability

People living with disabilities seem sensitive to how they are perceived by non-disabled people.

Some of the participants mentioned that people gossip and pay unnecessary attention to their disability, which makes them uncomfortable.

“You see my biggest problem as a blind person on this campus is that people tend to think that I am here for favours or there is a person who has done me a favour.

Sometimes when you seek for help from the staff and you are accompanied by a non-disabled person they would ask him or her about your condition. It’s like they don’t want us to be abused [sic], as if we are spoiled brats, it like they pity for us. No one should treat us differently or as if there is something wrong with us.” (participant 2)

“I think its people’s way of thinking that a disabled person is not adequate in some [way].” (participant 6)

A participant also mentioned that people living with disabilities sometimes feel excluded, particularly on occasions when they are unable to participate in some social and academic events due to different limitations.

“Sometimes I cannot attend such events due to the place it is situated. It’s inaccessible for me, therefore I sometimes feel excluded. So academically and socially there is exclusion.” (participant 3)

4.3 Conclusion

The results chapter was grouped into subthemes that represent the main experiences of SLWD. This chapter revealed some consistencies in the way SLWD report their experiences of learning in a higher education institution. Results will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Discussion

The study drew on the social model of disability (SMD) to understand the experiences of SLWD in higher education, thereby helping to facilitate an in-depth understanding of how students experience teaching methods, assessments, infrastructure, assistive technologies, social perceptions, as well as access to information in HEI. Based on this model as discussed previously, the disabling factor is not the person with an impairment; however, it is through the society's inaccessible structures, systems and environment that disabled persons experience being disabled (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002). This therefore implies that shortcomings of society may significantly affect the ways in which persons living with disability experience their environment (Burger & Burger, 2010). The factors described above adopted in higher education may be linked to the way those with disabilities experience being part of that environment (Burger & Burger, 2010). A study by Mathews (2009) that used the SMD as its theoretical framework, argued that universities should make an attempt to restructure educational environments as a matter of everyday practice to enable all students to flourish within them, rather than being disabled by them.

Findings of the study reveal that social life can be a struggle for most of the participants, particularly in how they are perceived by others. Although previous studies emphasised the perceptions and attitudes of lecturers towards SLWD as a large contributor to the social exclusion felt by SLWDs (Donohue & Bornman, 2014), the current study found that it was how other non-disabled students perceived and treated them that caused discomfort. The unnecessary attention and attitude of pity from other students causes them to feel self-conscious. Furthermore, findings revealed that SLWD feel socially excluded from or at some social events because of the location, lack of transportation, assistance and the nature of the social event. As a result, SLWD have limited interactions within the social systems on campus. Previous studies have consistently highlighted the negative impact of social exclusion of SLWDs. A study by Mamiseishvili and Koch (2011) revealed that students who

were socially excluded from social activities such as clubs, sports and fine arts activities in higher education were less likely to go through to the second year than students who were engaged, even infrequently, in any of the social activities. The depth of the negative impact should persuade HEI to encourage more interactions between SLWD and non-disabled peers within the culture of the academy.

The current study found several factors underlying the academic challenges experienced by SLWDs. Unaccommodating infrastructure was central to these challenges. Findings revealed that the physical environment of the university insufficiently met the needs of SLWD. Not all lecture venues were accessible to SLWD, and as a result, some students failed, and others obtained poor results in modules that were taught in unaccommodating lecture venues. The study shows that the physical environment of the university may directly impact on the academic performance of SLWD. This provides support for the findings of a study conducted in Norway by Brandt (2011), which documented the experiences of students living with disabilities. The study revealed that SLWD did not have the same study opportunities as non-disabled students, and the barriers related to educational accessibility kept SLWD from acquiring knowledge and expertise. Unfortunately, according to Connor and Robinson (2009), improvements and implementations to date seem to be based on a system where priority, budget and cost effectiveness are the determining factors.

Challenges in learning included barriers to accessing information. The current study found that such barriers included lack of availability of study material in alternate formats. For example, the findings revealed that students living with blindness could not find required study material in the library due to lack of books available as audio books or books written in braille. Those who had physical limitations revealed difficulty in reaching books placed in high shelves. These findings are consistent with findings of a study by Mosia and Phasa (2017) which revealed that partially sighted students struggled with finding user-friendly study material such as brailled books and books written in large print to facilitate access to required reading. Additionally, Mosia and Phasa's study found that there were no

alternate formats for prescribed books. As a result, the textbooks had to be transcribed in alternate formats and by the time they were ready the SLWD would have fallen behind with reaching deadlines for assignments.

Findings revealed that despite the positive role of DUs (disability units) toward full inclusion of SLWD in higher education, they still had limitations and challenges. The current study found that the disability unit had a role in provision of study material in alternate formats. Although some students valued the support services offered at the DU, others mentioned that the DU was short-staffed and had insufficient equipment to meet the needs of the population of SLWD. Consequently, students received their study material late and they were not able to submit their work on time. Notably, the DU was seen as the source of assistance for SLWD. Muntanga, (2015) argues that having a separate unit to provide assistance and services, risks stereotyping SLWD and alienating them from their peers while reinforcing a dominant culture that views SLWD as people who need to be helped by DUs in order to function in higher education systems.

Assistive technologies also play a large role in the learning experiences of students in higher education. However, accessing and properly using them required a great deal of effort (Ahmed, 2018). The current study found that although assistive technologies proved to be useful, some students had minimal training on how to use special software such as JAWs for visually impaired students. Other software was slow, outdated, and often had technical problems. This is in line with the findings of a study by Fitchen, Asuncion, Barlie, Fossey and Simone (2000), which suggested the need for training and assistance in the use of this software. Their study also found problems with software and hardware compatibility, which also suggested the need for regular updating of software and hardware of assistive technologies.

Most participants were reported that they satisfied with the assessment process, because the disability unit arranged for different needs of each individual to be met during assessment. Such arrangements

included scribes, time concessions and separate writing rooms for those who needed to speak to transcribers. These findings were in line with the findings of a study conducted in Stellenbosch by Cleophas (2016) which indicated that majority of the participants were satisfied with the availability of alternate assessments. Visually impaired participants in the study confirmed availability of braille, large print and electronic question papers, and further reported that computers, laptops and the use of scribes were arranged during assessment. However, a small percentage of participants found the arrangement of separate assessment venues for SLWDs discriminatory. This emphasises the need for caution when attending to the needs of SLWD, as their needs differ and treating them all the same might be perceived to be unfair.

Findings of the study revealed that SLWD employ various coping mechanisms to overcome the challenges and frustrations of studying in an accommodative environment. According to Crisp (2002), these frustrations can adversely degenerate into an individual not being able to actualise his or her aspirations. Results from the current study indicated that SLWD form relationships with other students for support. They rely on their peers for lecture notes, finding and accessing the facilities such as the library, cafeterias and lectures halls. At times when the lifts are not working, they rely on friends to carry them to the lecture venue. These findings are consistent with a study by Okoye (2010) on support systems and coping strategies by SLWDs in the University of Nigeria. The study found that institutionalised support systems for SLWDS was inadequate, revealing that SLWD relied on their friends, roommates, and other SLWD to carry out activities of daily living, such as fetching water, washing clothes, finding facilities and fetching books from the library. Based on the findings of the current and previous studies, there appear to be insufficient institutional support systems available for SLWDs.

5.2 Conclusion

The current study found that although the implementation of inclusive education policies remains relatively slow and only partial, there is little evidence of efforts made by the institution (UKZN) to create a conducive learning environment for SLWD. Overall, the study results revealed more negative than positive experiences by SLWD. Infrastructure and availability of study material in alternate formats were among the major issues of concern. The study also highlighted teaching methods and learning practices that exclude SLWD. Consequently, students obtained poor results and at times even failed certain modules. The experiences of social life were also discussed, highlighting the negative impact of limited interactions with the social systems on campus. Given the numerous challenges faced by SLWD, and the insufficient institutional support, coping mechanisms employed by students were also discussed.

5.3 Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, policy and practice to promote inclusive education in higher education institutions is of critical importance. It is therefore recommended that the university should declare a policy regarding the practical implementation of regulations pertaining to SLWDs. Some researchers, such as Mosia and Phasha (2016), have proposed the creation of awareness programmes on disability related issues among lecturers and students, encouraging more interactions between SLWD and non-disabled peers within the culture of the academy; creating budgets for infrastructural changes, updating technology and software and the employment of more supportive staff to explore ways to adapt programmes that are currently inaccessible to SLWD. It is hoped that findings of this study may assist the university in identifying pivotal areas for improvement and issues to consider for policy and practice as it works toward an inclusive transformative agenda.

5.4 Limitations.

This study focused only on SLWD so that the attitudes of the staff and non-disabled students could be measured mostly through the eyes of the SLWD. However, it neglected others whose input might have helped in understanding the lives of SLWD. It is recommended that non-disabled students and staff are included in the study to broaden the understanding of SLWD. Furthermore, this study only included a small number of participants ($n=8$), and as a result lacks a strong basis for generalisation. However, its implications may be useful in improving inclusive education in the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College campus). Lastly this study combined different disabilities. It may be necessary for future studies to explore experiences of students living with a specific disability to understand similarity or differences in experience, depending on the nature of the disability.

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Appendix A

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Demographic questionnaire administered prior to interview:

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Reference Number
2. Email address:
3. Contact number:
4. Birth date:
5. Gender:
6. Program/ courses currently enrolled for?

Interview questions

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

- 1. How would you explain the nature of your disability?**
- 2. How do you experience accessing facilities on campus?**
- 3. Can you describe how you experience learning in the institution?**
- 4. How would you explain a typical day on campus ?**
- 5. What are the challenges that you often come across due to your limitations?**

6. How do you experience Assessment?

Appendix B

Consent to participate in research



*A Qualitative Study Documenting the Experiences of Students with Disabilities
in the Howard College Campus (UKZN)*

Dear Participant

I hereby extend my invitation to you to consider participating in this research project.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the proposed study is to describe the experiences of Student with Disabilities at this University Campus. The study aims to document academic difficulties faced by disabled students and to highlight areas of improvement in teaching, learning, and assessment methods to create a conducive learning environment for disabled students. Data elicited from this study may be utilized by the disability unit of Howard College to develop or improve interventions aimed at enhancing the experience of higher education by Students with Disabilities.

2. PROCEDURES

The proposed study is concerned with the quality of the experiences of disabled students at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Howard College campus. This study will follow a qualitative research design as it is deemed appropriate to generate data through active engagement and creation of meaning in an interactive manner. If you agree to participate in the study, you will be interviewed for approximately 50 minutes.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The purpose of the study is to create awareness of challenges faced by disabled students and to contribute to their general well being. Therefore, your right will not be abused or violated for the purpose of gaining information and knowledge. Care will be taken not to expose you to any risk and/or discomfort.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR SOCIETY

There will be no financial benefits for participants. However, the findings of this study might help the institution gain awareness to the current learning barriers experienced by disabled students. This may help them to take pragmatic steps to address the needs of disabled students and to plan appropriate interventions where necessary. You as well as other students with disabilities may benefit from the interventions aimed at improving learning experiences for disabled students.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

Interview questions might include items that require personal responses. Therefore, this letter serves to assure you that all responses will be completely anonymous and at no point in the study will you be named. Confidentiality will be maintained by using numbers/codes instead of actual names. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of keeping all information (audio

recordings: password protected device) and (handwritten notes: locked away). All audio recording will be deleted after the completion of the study.

6. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. No participant should feel coerced in any way, and a decision to not participate will not result in any form of disadvantage. Subjects are free to withdraw from the study at any stage and for any reason. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study.

If there are any areas of concern or questions regarding the studies aim, purpose or role as a participant, please do hesitate to contact me on the contact details that are provided below.

<u>Contact details of Researcher</u>	<u>Contact details of Research Office</u>
Zizile Ngcobo 079 470 7271 zidumakude@gmail.com <u>Supervisor</u> Luvuyo Makhaba 031 260 7729 makhabav@ukzn.ac.za	Phumelele Ximba Administrative Officer 031 260 3587 XIMBAP@ukzn.ac.za

Participant Declaration

By signing this consent form, you agree to participate in the research study explained and indicate that you fully understand the study, its aims and purpose as well as your role as a participant.

I _____ am participating freely and I understand that I can withdraw at any point should I choose to no longer continue and that this decision will not affect me negatively. I hereby consent / do not consent to have this interview recorded. I understand that this research project will not benefit or harm me personally, and I understand that my participation will remain private and confidential.

Respondent Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

Ethical Clearance Approval Letter



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22 January 2018

Mrs Zizile Ngcobo (215075644)
School of Applied Human Sciences
— Psychology Howard College
Campus

Dear Mrs Ngcobo,

Protocol reference number : HSS/1489/017M

Project title: A qualitative study documenting the experiences of students with disabilities in the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College)

Approval Notification — Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

With regards to your response received on 18 October 2017 to our letter of 07 October 2017, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted FULL APPROVAL.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue, Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



.....
Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)

/ms

cc Supervisor: V Makhaba
cc Academic Leader
Research: Dr Jean Steyn cc
School Administrator: Ms
Ayanda Ntuli

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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